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JACK THE FISHERMAN



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JACK THE FISHERMAN

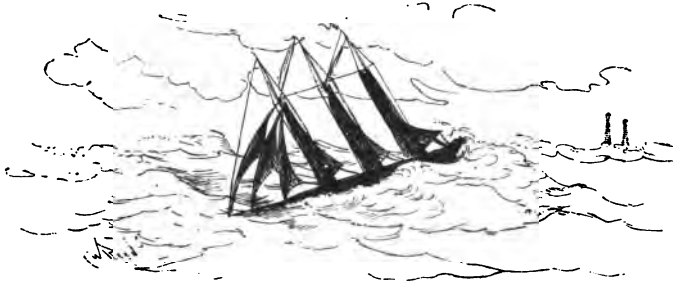
BY

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

C. W. REED



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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JACK THE FISHERMAN.



I.

WAS a Fairharbor boy. This might be to say any of several things; but it is at least sure to say one, — he was a fisherman, and the son of a fisherman.

When people of another sort than Jack's have told their earthly story through, the biography, the memorial, the obituary remains. Our poet, preacher, healer, politician, and the rest pass on to this polite sequel which society has ordained for human existence. When Jack dies, he stops. We find the fisherman squeezed into some corner of the accident column: "Washed overboard," or "Lost in the fog," and that is the whole of it. He ends just there. There is no more Jack. No fellow-members in the Society for Something-or-Nothing pass resolutions to his credit and the consolation of his family. No funeral discourse is preached over him and privately printed at the request of the parishioners. The columns of the religious weekly to which he did not subscribe contain no obituary sketches signed by the initials of friends not

thought to be too afflicted to speak a good word for a dead man. From the press of the neighboring city no thin memorial volume sacred to his virtues and stone-blind to his defects shall ever issue. Jack needs a biographer. Such the writer of this sketch would fain aspire to be.

Jack was born at sea. His father was bringing his mother home from a visit at a half-sister's in Nova Scotia, for Jack's mother was one of those homesick, clan-nish people who pine without their relations as much as some of us pine with them ; and even a half-sister was worth more to her in her fanciful and feeble condition than a whole one is apt to be to bolder souls.

She had made her visit at her half-sister's, and they had talked over receipts, and compared yeast, and cut out baby things, and turned dresses, and dyed flannel, and gone to prayer-meetings together ; and Jack's mother was coming home, partly because Jack's father came for her, and partly because he happened to come sober, which was a great point, and partly because the schooner had to sail, which was another, — she was coming home, at all events, when a gale struck them. It was an ugly blow. The little two-masted vessel swamped, in short, at midnight of a moonlit night, off the coast, just the other side of seeing Cape Ann light. The crew were picked up by a three-master, and taken home. Aboard the three-master, in fright and chill and storm, the little boy was born. They always put it that he was born in Fairharbor. In fact, he was born rounding Eastern Point. "The toughest place to be borned in, this side o' Torment," Jack's father said. But Jack's mother said nothing at all.

Jack's father kept sober till he got the mother and the

child safely into the little crumbling, gray cottage in half of whose meagre dimensions the family kept up the illusion which they called home. Then, for truth compels me, I must state that Jack's father went straightway out upon what, in even less obscure circles than his, it is customary to call "a tear." There seems to be something in the savage, incisive fitness of this word which has over-ridden all mere distinctions of class or culture, and must ultimately make it a classic in the language. "I've stood it long as I ken stand, and I'm goin' on a tear, — I'm agoin' on a *netarnal* tear," said Jack's father to his oldest dory-mate, a fellow he had a feeling for, much as you would for an oar you had handled a good many years ; or perhaps a sail that you were used to, and had patched and watched, and knew the cracks in it, and the color of it, and when it was likely to give way, and whereabouts it would hold.

In fact, that proved to be, in deed and truth, an eternal tear for Jack's father. Drunk as a fisherman could be, — and that is saying a good deal, — he reshipped that night, knowing not whither nor why, nor indeed knowing that the deed was done ; and when he came to himself he was twelve hours out, on his way to the Banks of Newfoundland ; and the young mother, with her baby on her arm, looked out of the frosty window over the foot of her old bedstead, and watched for him to come, and did not like to tell the neighbors that she was short of fuel.

She was used to waiting — women are ; Fairharbor women always are. But she had never waited so long before. And when, at the end of her waiting, the old dory-mate came in one night and told her that it happened falling from the mast because he was not sober

enough to be up there, Jack's mother said she had always expected it. But she had not expected it, all the same. We never expect trouble, we only fear it. And she had put the baby on the edge of the bed and got upon her knees upon the floor, and laid her face on the baby, and tried to say her prayers, — for she was a pious



little woman, not knowing any better, — but found she could not pray, she cried so. And the old dory-mate told her not to try, but to cry as hard as she could. And she told him he was very kind; and so she did. For she was fond of her husband although he got drunk; because he got drunk, one is tempted to say. Her heart had gone the way of the hearts of drunkards' wives: she loved in proportion to her misery, and gave on equation with what she lost. All the woman in her mothered her husband when she could no longer wifely worship him. When he died she felt as if she had lost

her eldest child. So, as I say, she kneeled with her face on the baby, and cried as if she had been the blessedest of wives. Afterward she thought of this with self-reproach. She said one day to the old dory-mate :

“ When my trouble came, I did not pray to God. I ’d ought to have. But I only cried at Him.”

Jack had come into the world in a storm, and he began it stormily. He was a big, roaring baby, and he became a restless boy.

His mother’s gentle and unmodified femininity was helpless before the problem of this wholly masculine little being. She said Jack needed a man to manage him. He smoked at six ; he lived in the stables and on the wharves at eight ; he came when he got ready, and went when he



pleased ; he obeyed when he felt like it, and when he was punished, he kicked. Once, in an imaginative moment, he bit her.

She sent him to pack mackerel, for they were put to it to keep soul and body together, and he brought home such habits of speech as even the Fairharbor woman had never heard. From her little boy, her baby, — not yet old enough to be out of short trousers, and scarcely out of little sacks, had he been *yours*, my Lady, at the pretty age when one still fastens lace collars round their

necks, and has them under shelter by dark, and hears their prayers, and challenges the breath of heaven lest it blow too rudely on some delicate forming fibre of soul or body, — from her little boy, at eight years old, the mother first learned the abysses of vulgarity in a seaport town.

It must be admitted that her education in this respect had been defective. She had always been one of the women in whose presence her neighbors did not speak too carelessly.

But Jack's mother had the kind of eyes which do not see mire, — the meek, religious, deep-blue eye which even growing sons respect while they strike the tears from it. At his worst Jack regarded her as a species of sacred fact, much like heaven or a hymn. Sometimes on Sunday nights he stayed at home with her; he liked to hear her sing. She sang Rock of Ages in her best black alpaca with her work-worn hands crossed upon the gingham apron which she put on to save the dress.

But ah, she said, Jack needed a man to manage him. And one day when she said this, in spite of her gentle unconsciousness, or because of it, the old dory-mate to whom she said it said he thought so too, and that if she had no objections he would like to be that man.

And the Fairharbor widow, who had never thought of such a thing, said she did n't know as she had; for nobody knew, she said, how near to starving they had come; and it was something to have a sober man. So, on this reasonable basis, Jack acquired a step-father, and his step-father sent him straightway to the Grand Banks.

He meant it well enough, and perhaps it made no difference in the end. But Jack was a little fellow to

go fishing, — only ten. His first voyage was hard : it was a March voyage ; he got badly frostbitten, and the skipper was rough. He was knocked about a good deal, and had the measles by himself in his berth ; and the men said they did n't know they had brought a baby to the Banks, for they were very busy ; and Jack lay and cried a little, and thought about his mother, and wished he had n't kicked her, but forgot it when he got well. So he swaggered about among the men, as a boy does when he is the only one in a crew, and aped their talk, and shared their grog, and did their hard work, and learned their songs, and came home with the early stages of moral ossification as well set in upon his little heart as a ten-year-old heart allows.

The next voyage did not mend the matter ; nor the next. And though the old dory-mate was an honest fellow, he had been more successful as a dory-mate than he was as a step-father. He and Jack did not "get on." Sometimes Jack's mother wondered if he *had* needed a man to manage him ; but she never said so. She was a good wife, and she had fuel enough, now ; she only kissed Jack and said she meant it for the best, and then she went away and sang Rock of Ages to the tune of Martyn, very slow, and quite on the wrong key. It seemed to make her feel better, poor thing. Jack sometimes wondered why.

When he was twelve years old he came home from a winter voyage one night, and got his pay for his share, — boy's pay, yet, for a boy's share ; but bigger than it used to be, — and did not go home first, but went rollicking off with a crowd of Portuguese. It was a Sunday night, and his mother was expecting him, for she knew the boat was in. His step-father expected him

too, — and his money; and Jack knew that. His mother had been sick, but Jack did not know that; she had been very sick, and had asked for him a great deal. There had been a baby, — born dead while its father was off-shore after cod, — and it had been very cold weather; and something had gone wrong.

At midnight of that night some one knocked at the door of the crumbling cottage. The step-father opened



it; he looked pale and agitated. Some boys were there in a confused group; they bore what seemed to be a lifeless body on a drag, or bob-sled; it was Jack, dead drunk.

It was the first time, — he was only twelve, — and one of the Fairharbor boys took the pipe from his mouth to explain.

"He was trapped by a Portygee, and they've stole every cent of him, 'n kicked him out, 'n lef' him, stranded like a monk-fish, so me and the other fellers we borried a sled and brung him home, for we thought his mother'd rather. He ain't dead, but he's just as drunk as if he was sixty!"

The Fairharbor boy mentioned this circumstance with a kind of abnormal pride, as if such superior maturity were a point for a comrade to make note of. But Jack's step-father went out softly, and shut the door, and said :

"Look here, boys, — help me in with him, will you? Not *that* way. His mother's in there. She died an hour ago."

II.

AND so the curse of his heredity came upon him. She never knew, thank Heaven. Her knowledge would have been a kind of terrible fore-omniscience, if she had. She would have had no hope of him from that hour. Her experience would have left her no illusions. The drunkard's wife would have educated the drunkard's mother too "liberally" for that. She would have taken in the whole scope and detail of the future in one midnight moment's breadth, as a problem in the higher mathematics may rest upon the width of a geometrical point. But she did not know. We say—I mean, it is our fashion of saying—that she did not know. God was merciful. She had asked for Jack, it seemed, over and over, but did not complain of him for not coming; she never complained of Jack. She said the poor

boy must have stayed somewhere to have a pleasant time ; and she said they were to give her love to him, if he came in while she was asleep. And then she asked her husband to sing Rock of Ages for her, because she did not feel very strong. He could n't sing, — more than a halibut, poor fellow ; but he did not like to disappoint her, for he thought she looked what he called "miser'ble" ; so he sat down by the bed and raised his hoarse, weather-beaten voice to the tune of Martyn, as best he could, and mixed up two verses inextricably with a line from "Billy's on the bright blue sea," which he added because he saw he must have something to fill out, and it was all he could think of, — but she thanked him very gently, and said he sang quite well ; and said once more that he was to give her love to Jack ; and went to sleep afterward ; and by and by, they could not wake her to see her boy of twelve brought to her drunk.

The curse of his heredity was upon him. We may blame, we may loathe, we may wonder, we may despair ; but we must not forget. There were enough to blame without remembering. Jack, like all drunkards, soon learned this. In fact, he did not remember it very well himself, — not having been acquainted with his father ; and never sentimentalized over himself nor whined for his bad luck, — but owned up to his sins, with the bluntness of an honest, bad fellow. He was rather an honest fellow, in spite of it all. He never lied when he was sober.

If the curse of his ancestry had come upon him, its compensatory temperament came too. Jack had the merry heart of the easy drinker.

Born with his father's alcoholized brain-cells, poor

baby, endowed with the narcotined conscience which this species of parentage bequeaths, he fell heir to the kind of attractiveness that goes with the legacy.

He was a happy-go-lucky fellow. Life sat airily on him. He had his mother's handsome eyes dashed with his father's fun (for she could n't take a joke, to save her); he told a good story; he did a kind deed; he was generous with his money, when he had any, and never in the least disturbed when he had n't. He was popular to the dangerous extent that makes one's vices seem a kind of social introduction, and not in Jack's circle alone, be it said.

Every crew wanted him. Drunk or sober, as a shipmate he was at par. It was usually easy for him to borrow. The fellows made up his fines for him, there was always somebody to go bail for him when he got before the police court. Arrested perhaps a half dozen times a year, in his

maddest years, he never was sent to the House in his life. There were always people enough who thought it a pity to let such a good fellow go to prison. He had — I was going to say as a matter of course he had — curly hair. One should not omit to notice that he was splendidly tattooed. He was proud, as seamen are, of



his brawny arms, dashed from wrist to shoulder with the decorative ingenuity of his class. Jack had æsthetic views of his own, indeed, about his personal allowance of indigo. He had objected to the customary medley of anchors, stars, and crescents, and exhibited a certain reserve of taste, which was rather interesting. On his left arm he bore a very crooked lighthouse rising from a heavy sea; he was, in fact, quite flooded along the bicipital muscle with waves and billows, but nothing else interfered with the massive proportions of the effect. This was considered a masterly design, and Jack was often called upon to push up his sleeve and explain how he came by the inspiration.

Upon the other arm he wore a crucifix, ten inches long; this was touched with blood-red ink; the dead Christ hung upon it, lean and pitiful. Jack said he took the crucifix against his drowning. It was an uncommonly large and ornate crucifix.

Jack was a steady drinker at nineteen. At twenty-five he was what either an inexperienced or a deeply experienced temperance missionary would have called incurable. The intermediate grades would have confidently expected to save him.

Of course he reformed. He would not have been interesting if he had not. The unmitigated sot has few attractions even for seafaring society. It is the foil and flash, the by-play and side-light of character, that "lead us on." Jack was always reforming. After that night when he was brought home on the bob-sled, the little boy was as steady and as miserable as he knew how to be for a long time; he drew the unfortunate inference that the one involved the other. By the time his mother's grave was green with the scanty Fairharbor

church-yard grass, — for even the sea-wind seems to have a grudge against the very dead for choosing dry graves in Fairharbor, and scants them in their natural covering, — by that time rank weeds had overgrown the sorrow of the homeless boy. He and his step-father “got on” less than ever now, as was to be expected; and when one day Jack announced with characteristic candor that he was going to get drunk, if he went to Torment for it, the two parted company; and the crumbling cottage knew Jack no more. By and by, when his step-father was drowned at Georges’, Jack borrowed the money for some black gloves and a hat-band. He had the reputation of being a polite fellow; the fishermen spelled it t-o-n-y. Truth to tell, the old dory-mate had wondered sometimes on Sunday afternoons if he *had* been the man to manage Jack; and felt that the main object of his second marriage had been defeated.

Jack, as I say, was always reforming. Every temperance society in the city had a hand at him. They were of the old-fashioned, easy type which took their responsibilities comfortably. They held him out on a pair of moral tongs, and tried to toast his misdemeanors out of him, before a quick fire of pledges and badges; and when he tumbled out of the tongs, and asked the president and treasurer why they did n’t bow to him in the street when he was drunk, or why, if he was good enough for them in the lodge-room, he was n’t good enough to shake hands with before folks on the post-office steps, or propounded any of those ingenious posers with which his kind are in the habit of disturbing the benevolent spirit, they snapped the tongs to, and turned him over to the churches.

These touched him gingerly. They invited him into

the free pews, — a dismal little row in the gallery, — sent him a tract or two, and asked him a few well-meant and very confusing religious questions, to which Jack's replies were far from satisfactory. One ardent person, a recent convert, coaxed him into a weekly prayer-meeting. It was a very good, honest, uninteresting prayer-meeting, and there were people sitting there beside him



with clean lives and clear faces whose motives Jack was not worthy to understand, and he knew enough to know it. But it happened to be a foreign mission prayer-meeting, devoted to the Burmese field ; which was, therefore, be it said, not so much an argument against foreign missions, as a deficient means of grace to the fisherman. Jack was terribly bored. He ran his hands through his curls, and felt for his tobacco, and whispered to the

young convert to know if there were n't any waits in the play so a man could get out without hurting anybody's feelings. But just then the young convert struck up a hymn, and Jack stayed.

He liked the singing. His restless, handsome face took on a change such as a windy day takes on toward dusk, when the breeze dies down. When he found they were singing Rock of Ages, he tried to sing it too, — for he was a famous tenor on deck. But when he had sung a line or two, — flash ! down in one of the empty pews in front, he saw a thin old lady with blue eyes, sitting in a black alpaca dress with her hands clasped on her gingham apron.

"That's my mother. Have I got the jim-jams?" asked this unaccustomed worshiper of himself. But then he remembered that he was sober. He could sing no longer after this, but bowed his head and looked into his old felt hat, and wondered if he were going to cry, or get religion. In point of fact, he did neither of these things, because a very old church-member arose just then, and said he saw a poor castaway in our midst to-night, and he besought the prayers of the meeting for his soul. Jack stopped crying. He looked hard at the old church-member. He knew him ; had always known him. The fisherman waited till that prayer was through, — it was rather a long prayer, — and then he too sprang to his feet. He looked all around the decorous place ; his face was white with the swift passion of the drinking man.

"I never spoke in meetin' in my life," said Jack in an unsteady voice. "I ain't religious. I drink. But I'm sober to-night, and I've got something to say to you. I heard what that man said. I know him. He's old Jim

Crownoby. I've always knowed Jim Crownoby. He owns a sight of property in this town. He's a rich man. He owns that block on Black street. You know he does. You can't deny it. Nor he can't neither. All I want to say is, I've got drunk in one of them places of his, time and again; and if there ain't anybody but *him* to pray for my soul, I'd rather go to the devil."

Jack stopped short, jammed on his hat, and left the meeting. In the shocked rustle that followed, some one had the tact to start "Rescue the perishing," as the fisherman strode down the broad aisle. He did not go again. The poor young convert followed him up for a week or two, and gave him an expensive Testament, bought out of an almost invisible personal income, in vain.

"I've no objections to you," said Jack candidly; "I'm much obliged to ye for yer politeness, sir. But them churches that sub-leases to a rum-seller, I don't think they onderstand a drinkin' man. Hey? Well, ain't he their biggest rooster, now? Don't he do the heft of the payin', and the tallest of their crowin', consequent? Thought so. Better leave me go, sir. I ain't a pious man; I'm a fisherman."

"Fishes," said Jack, "is no fools."

He gave voice to this remark one day in Boston, when he was twenty-five years old. He was trying to entertain a Boston girl; she was not familiar with Fair-harbor or with the scenery of his calling; he wanted to interest her; he liked the girl. He had liked a good many girls, it need not be said; but this one had laid upon the fisherman — she knew not how, he knew not

why, and what man or woman of us could have told him?—the power that comes not of reason, or of time, or of trying, or of wisdom, or of rightness, but of the mystery to which, when we are not speaking of Jack, we give the name of love. It seems a sacrilegè, admit, to write it here, and of these two. But there, again, it would be easy to be wrong. The study of the relativity of human feeling is a delicate science; it calls for a fine moral equipment. If this were the high-water mark of nature for Jack — and who shall say? — the tide shall have its sacred due, even down among those weeds and in that mud. He liked that girl, among them all, and her he thought of gently. He had known her a long time; as much as three months. When the vessel came into Boston to sell halibut, he had a few days there, drifting about as seamen do, homeless and reckless; dashing out the wages just paid off, in ways that sometimes he remembered and sometimes he forgot, and that usually left him without a dollar toward his next fine when he should be welcomed by the police court of his native city on returning home.

Jack thought, I say, gravely of this girl. He never once took her name in vain among the fellows; and she had not been a very good girl either. But Jack reflected that he was not very good himself, if you came to that. His downright, honest nature stood him in stead in this moral distinction; there was always a broad streak of generosity in him at his worst; it goes with the temperament, we say, and perhaps we say it too often to give him half the credit of it.

She was a pretty girl, and she was very young. She had told Jack her story, as they strolled about the bright Boston streets on comfortable winter evenings;

when he took her to the variety show, or to the oyster-shop, and they talked together. Jack pitied her. Perhaps she deserved it ; it was a sad little story — and she was so very young ! She had a gentle way, with Jack ; for some reason, God knows why, she had trusted him from the first, and he had never once been known to disturb her trust. That was the pleasant part of it.

On this evening that we speak of, Jack was sober. He was often sober when he had an evening to spend with the Boston girl ; not always — no ; truth must be told. She looked as pretty as was in her that night ; she had black eyes and a kind of yellow hair that Jack had never seen crinkled low on the forehead above black eyes before ; he thought her as fine to look at as any actress he ever saw ; for the stage was Jack's standard of the magnificent, as it is to so many of his sort. The girl's name was Teen. Probably she had been called Christine once, in her country home ; she even told Jack she had been baptized.

"I was n't, myself," said Jack ; "I roared so, they darse n't do it. My mother got me to church, for she was a pious woman, and I pummeled the parson in the face with both fists, and she said she come away, for she was ashamed of me. She always said that christenin' was n't never legal. It disappointed her, too. I was an awful baby."

"I should think likely," said Teen with candor. "Do you set much by your mother ?"

"She's dead," said Jack in a subdued voice. Teen looked at him ; she had never heard him speak like that.

"I 'most wished mine was," said the girl ; "she 'd 'a' ben better off — along of me."

"That's so," said Jack.

The two took a turn in silence up and down the brightly lighted street; their thoughts looked out strangely from their marred young faces; they felt as if they were in a foreign country. Jack had meant to ask her to take a drink, but he gave it up; he could n't, somehow.

"Was you always a fisherman?" asked Teen, feeling, with a woman's tact, that somebody must change the current of the subject.

"I was a fisherman three generations back," Jack answered her; "borned a fisherman, you bet! I could n't 'a' ben nothin' else if I'd drowneded for it. It's a smart business. You hev to keep your wits about you. Fishes is no fools."

"Ain't they?" asked the girl listlessly. She was conscious of failing in conversational brilliancy; but the truth was, she could n't get over what they had been saying: it was always unfortunate when she remembered her mother. Jack began to talk to her about his business again, but Teen did not reply; and when he looked down at her to see what ailed her, there were real tears rolling over her pretty cheeks.

"Why, Teen!" said Jack.

"Leave go of me, Jack," said Teen, "and let me get off; I ain't good company to-night. I've got the dumps. I can't entertain ye, Jack. And, Jack — don't let's talk about mothers next time, will we? It spoils the evenin'. Leave go of me, and I'll go home by my own self. I'd rather."

"I won't leave go of you!" cried Jack with a sudden blazing purpose lighting up all the corners of his soul. It was a white light, not unholy; it seemed to shine

through and through him with a soft glow like a candle on an altar. "I'll never leave go of you, Teen, if you'll say so. I'd rather marry you."



"Marry *me*?" said Teen.

"Yes, marry you. I'd a sight rather. There, now! It's out with it. What do you say to that, Teen?"

With one slow finger-tip Teen wiped away the tears that fell for her mother. A ring on her finger glistened in the light as she did this. She saw the sparkle, tore off the ring and dashed it away ; it fell into the mud, and was trodden out of sight instantly. Jack sprang gallantly to pick it up.

"Don't you touch it !" cried the girl. She put her bared hand back upon his arm. The ring had left a little mark upon her finger ; she glanced at this, and looked up into Jack's handsome face ; he looked very kind.

"Jack, dear," said Teen softly, "I ain't fit to marry ye."

"You're fitter 'n I be," answered Jack manfully. Teen sighed ; she did not speak at once ; other tears came now, but these were tears for herself and for Jack. Jack felt this, after his fashion ; they gave him singular confusion of mind.

"I would n't cry about it, Teen. You need n't have me if you don't want to."

"But I *do* want to, Jack."

"Honest ?"

"Honest it is, Jack."

"Will ye make a good wife, Teen ?" asked Jack, after some unprecedented thought.

"I'll try, Jack."

"You'll never go back on me, nohow ?"

"I ain't that sort !" cried the girl, drawing herself up a little. A new dignity sat upon her with a certain grace which was beautiful to see.

"Will you swear it, Teen ?"

"If you'd rather, Jack."

"What'll you swear by, now ?" asked Jack. "You must swear by all you hold holy."

"What *do* I hold holy?" mused Teen.

"Will you swear," continued Jack seriously, "will you swear to me by the Rock of Ages?"

"What's that?" asked the girl.

"It's a hymn-tune. I want you to swear me by the Rock of Ages that you'll be that you say you will, to me. Will you do it, Teen?"

"Oh yes," said Teen, "I'll do it. Where shall we come across one?"

"I guess I can find it," Jack replied. "I can find 'most anything I set out to."

So they started out at random, in their reckless fashion, in the great city, to find the Rock of Ages for the asking.

Jack led his companion hither and yon, peering into churches and vestries and missions, and wherever he saw signs of sacred things. Singing they heard abundantly in the gay town; songs merry, mad, and sad; but not the song for a girl to swear by, that she would be true wife to a man who trusted her.

Wandering thus, on the strange errand whose pathos was so far above their own dream or knowledge, they chanced at last upon the place and the little group of people known in that part of Boston as Mother Mary's meeting.

The girl said she had been there once, but that Mother Mary was too good for her; she was one of the real kind. Everybody knew Mother Mary and her husband; he was a parson. They were poor folks themselves, Teen said, and understood poor folks, and did for them all the year round, not clearing out, like rich ones, when it came hot weather, but stood by 'em, Teen said. They kept the little room open, and if you wanted a

prayer you went in and got it, just as you'd call for a drink or a supper ; it was always on hand for you, and a kind word sure to come with it, and you always knew where to go for 'em ; and Mother Mary treated you like folks. She liked her, Teen said. If she'd been a different girl, she'd have gone there of a cold night all winter. But Teen said she felt ashamed.

"I guess she'll have what I'm after," said Jack. "She sounds like she would. Let's go in and see."

So they went into the quiet place among the praying people, and stood staring, for they felt embarrassed. Mother Mary looked very white and peaceful ; she was a tall, fair woman ; she wore a black dress with white about the bosom ; it was a plain, old dress, much mended. Mother Mary did not look rich, as Teen had said. The room was filled with poor creatures gathered about her like her children, while she talked with them and taught them as she could. She crossed the room immediately to where the young man stood, with the girl beside him.

"We've come," said Jack, "to find the Rock of Ages." He drew Teen's hand through his arm, and held it for a moment ; then, moved by some fine instinct mysterious to himself, he lifted and laid it in Mother Mary's own.

"Explain it to her, ma'am," he said ; "tell her, won't you ? I'm going to marry her, if she'll have me. I want her to swear by somethin' holy she'll be a true wife to me. She had n't anything particularly holy herself, and the holiest thing I know of is the Rock of Ages. I've heard my mother sing it. She's dead. We've been huntin' Boston over to-night after the Rock of Ages."



"I'LL BE AN HONEST WIFE TO YOU." Page 25.

Mother Mary was used to the pathos of her sober work, but the tears sprang now to her large and gentle eyes. She did not speak to Jack, — could not possibly, just then ; but, delaying only for the moment till she could command herself, she flung her rich, maternal voice out upon the words of the old hymn. Her husband joined her, and all the people present swelled the chorus.

" Rock of Ages, cleft for me !
Let me hide myself in thee ;
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

They sang it all through, — the three verses that everybody knows, — and Jack and Teen stood listening. Jack tried to sing himself ; but Teen hid her face, and cried upon his arm.

" Thou must save," sang the praying people ; " Thou must save, and thou alone ! "

The strain died solemnly ; the room was quiet ; the minister yonder began to pray, and all the people bowed their heads. But Mother Mary stood quite still, with the girl's hand trembling in her own.

" Swear it, Teen ! " Jack bent down his curly head and whispered ; he would not shame his promised wife before these people. " Swear by *that*, you'll be true wife to me ! "

" I swear it, Jack," sobbed Teen. " If *that's* the Rock of Ages, I swear by it, though I was to die for it, I'll be an honest wife to you."

" Come back when you've got your license," said Mother Mary, smiling through her tears, " and my husband will marry you if you want him to."

"We'll come to-morrow," Jack answered gravely.

"Jack," said Teen in her pretty way, — for she had a very pretty way, — "if I'm an honest wife to you, will you be *kind* to me?" She did not ask him to swear it by the Rock of Ages. She took his word for it, poor thing! Women do.



III.

MOTHER MARY'S husband married them next day at the Mission meeting; and Mother Mary sat down at the melodeon in the corner of the pleasant place, and played and sang Toplady's great hymn for them, as Jack had asked her. It was his wedding march. He was very sober and gentle, — almost like a better man. Teen thought him the handsomest man she had ever seen.

"Oh, I say, Teen," he nodded to her, as they walked away, "one thing I forgot to tell you, — I'm reformed."

"Are you, Jack?"

"If I ever drink a drop again, so help me" — But he stopped.

"So help you, Rock of Ages?" asked the new-made wife. But Jack winced; he was honest enough to hesitate at this.

"I don't know 's I'd darst — *that*," he added ruefully. "But I'm reformed. I have lost all hanker for liquor. I shall never drink again. You'll see, Teen."

Teen did see, as was to be expected. She saw a great deal, poor thing ! Jack did not drink — for a long time ; it was nearly five months, for they kept close count. He took her to Fairharbor, and rented the old half of the crumbling cottage where his mother used to sit and watch for him on long, late evenings. The young wife did the watching now. They planted some cinnamon rose-bushes

by the doorsteps of the cottage, and fostered them affectionately. Jack was as happy and sober as possible, to begin with. He picked the cinnamon roses and brought them in for his wife to wear. He was proud to have a home of his own ; he had not expected to ; in fact, he had never had one since that night when his mother



said they were to give her love to him, if he came home while she was asleep. He had beaten about so, sleeping for the most part in his berth, and sailing again directly ; he had never had any place, he said, to hang his winter clothes in ; closets and bureaus seemed treasure-houses to him, and the kitchen fire a luxury greater than a less

good-looking man would have deserved. When he came home, drenched and chilly, from a winter voyage, and Teen took the covers off, and the fiery heart of the coals leaped out to greet him, and she stood in the rich color, with her yellow hair, young and fair and sweet as any man's wife could look, and said she had missed him, and called him her dear husband, Jack even went so far as to



feel that Teen was the luxury. He treated her accordingly ; that was at first. He came straight home to her ; he kept her in flour and fuel ; she had the little things and the gentle words that women need. Teen was very fond of him. This was the first of it, — I was going to say this was the worst of it. All there was of Teen seemed to have gone into her love for Jack. A part of Jack had gone into his love for Teen. Teen was very

happy, to begin with. The respectable neighbors came to see her, and said, "We're happy to make your acquaintance." Nobody knew that it had not always been so that Teen's acquaintance would have been a source of social happiness. And she wrote to her mother that she was married; and her mother came on to make her a little visit; and Teen cried her soul out for joy. She was very modest and home-keeping and loving; no wife in the land was truer than this girl he had chosen was to the fisherman who chose her. Jack knew that. He believed in her. She made him happy; and therefore she kept him right.

All this was at first. It did not last. Why should we expect that, when we see how little there is in the relation of man and woman which lasts? If happy birth and gentle rearing, and the forces of what we call education, and the silken webs of spun refinements, are so strained in the tie which requires two who cannot get away from each other to make each other happy, how should we ask, of the law of chances, the miracle for Teen and Jack?

There was no miracle. No transubstantiation of the common bread to holy flesh was wrought upon that poor altar. Their lot went the way of other lots, with the facts of their history dead against them. Trouble came, and poverty, and children, and care, and distaste. Jack took to his old ways, and his wife to the tears that they bring. The children died; they were poor sickly babies who wailed a little while in her arms, and slipped out because there was n't enough to them to stay. And the gray house was damp. Some said it was diphtheria; but their mother said it was the will of God. She added: Might his will be done! On the whole she was not

sorry. Their father struck her when he was in liquor. She thought if the babies lived they might get hurt. A month before the last one was born she showed to Jack's biographer a bruise across her shoulder, long and livid. She buttoned her dress over it with hasty repentance.

"Maybe I'd ought n't to have told," she said. "But he said he'd be *kind* to me."

Jack was very sorry about this when he was sober. He kissed his wife, and bought a pair of pink kid shoes for the baby ; which it never grew large enough to wear.

I am not writing a temperance story, only the biography of a fisherman, and a few words will say better than many how it was. Alcoholized brain-cells being one of the few bequests left to society which the heirs do not dispute, Jack went back to his habits with the ferocity that follows abstinence. Hard luck came. Teen was never much of a housekeeper ; she had left her mother too early ; had never been taught. Things were soggy, and not always clean ; and she was so busy in being struck and scolded, and in bearing and burying babies, that it grew comfortless beside the kitchen fire. The last of the illusions which had taken the name of home within the walls of the crumbling half-cottage withered out of it, just as the cinnamon roses did the summer Jack watered them with whiskey by a little emotional mistake.

A worse thing had happened too. Some shipmate had "told" in the course of time ; and Teen's pre-matrimonial story got set adrift upon the current — one of the cruelest currents of its kind — of Fairharbor gossip. The respectable neighbors made her feel it, as only respectable neighbors do such things. Jack, rag-

ing, overheard her name upon the wharves. Teen had been "that she said she would" to him. He knew it. No matron in the town had kept her life or heart more



true. In all her sickness and trouble and slackness, and in going cold or hungry, and in her vivid beauty that none or all of these things could quench, Teen had carried a sweet dignity of her own as the racer in the old Promethean festival carried the torch while he ran

against the wind. Jack knew, — oh yes, he knew. But he grew sullen, suspicious. When he was drunk he was always jealous; it began to take that form. When he was sober he still admired his wife; sometimes he went so far as to remember that he loved her. When this happened, Teen dried her eyes, and brushed her yellow hair, and washed up the kitchen floor, and made the coffee, and said to the grocer when she paid for the sugar :

“My husband has reformed.”

One night Jack came home unexpectedly ; a strange mood sat upon him, which his wife did not find herself able to classify by any of the instant and exquisite perceptions which grow, like new faculties, in wives. He had been drinking heavily when he left her, and she had not looked for him for days ; if he sailed as he was, it would be a matter of weeks. Teen went straight to him ; she thought he might be hurt ; she held out her arms as she would to one of her children ; but he met her with a gesture of indifference, and she shrank back.

“She’s here,” said Jack. “Mother Mary’s in this d—— town. I see her.”

“I wish she’d talk to you,” said Teen, saying precisely the wrong thing by the fatal instinct which so often possesses drunkards’ wives.

“You do, do you?” quoth Jack. “Well, I don’t. I have n’t give her the chance.” He crushed on his hat and stole out of the house again.

But his mood was on him yet ; the difference being that his wife was out of it. He sulked and skulked about the streets alone for a while ; he did not go back to the boys just then, but wandered with the apparent aimlessness in which the most tenacious aims are

hidden. Mother Mary and her husband were holding sailors' meetings in the roughest quarter of the town. There was need enough of Mother Mary in Fairharbor. A crowd had gathered to hear the novelty. Fairharbor seamen were none too used to being objects of consideration ; it was a matter of mark that a parson and a lady



should hire a room from a rich fish-firm, pay for it out of their own scanty pockets, and invite one in from deck or wharf, in one's oil-clothes or jumper, to hear what a messmate of Jack's called a "high-toned prayer." He meant perhaps to convey the idea that the petition treated the audience politely.

Jack followed the crowd in the dark, shrinking in its wake, for he was now sober enough not to feel like himself. He waited till the last of the fellows he knew had

gone into the place and then crept up on tiptoe, and put his face against the window of the salt-cod warehouse where the little congregation was gathered, and looked in. The room was full and bright. It wore that same look of peace and shelter which he remembered. Mother Mary stood, as she had stood before, tall and pale in her black dress, with the white covering on her bosom. Her husband had been speaking to the fishermen, and she, as Jack put his gnarled hand to his excited eyes and his eyes to the window-glass, turned her face full about, to start the singing. She seemed to Jack to look at him. Her look was sad. He felt ashamed, and cowered down below the window-sill. But he wanted to hear her sing, — he had never heard anybody sing like Mother Mary, — and so he stayed there for a little while, curled against the fish-house. It began to rain, and he was pretty wet ; but Jack was in his jumper, and a ragged old jumper at that ; he knew he was not so handsome as he used to be ; he felt that he cut a poor figure even for a drunken fisherman ; all the self-respect that life had left him shrank from letting Mother Mary see him. Jack would not go in. A confused notion came to him, as he crouched against the warehouse, in the showers, that it was just as well it should rain on him ; it might wash him. He pushed up his sleeves and let the rain fall on his arms. He found an old Cape Ann turkey-box there was lying about, turned it edgewise so that one ragged knee might rest upon it, and thus bring his eye to a level with the window-sill, while yet he could not be seen from within. So he crouched listening. The glimmer from the prayer-room came across the fisherman's bared right arm, and struck the crucifix. Jack had the unconscious attitude

of one sinking, who had thrown up his arms to be saved. The Christ on the crucifix looked starved and sickly. Jack did not notice the crucifix.



At this moment Mother Mary's yearning voice rang out above the hoarse chorus of the fishermen, whose weather-ragged and reverent faces lifted themselves

mistily before her, as if they had been the countenance of one helpless man :

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me!"

"Oh, my God!" cried Jack.

IV.

It was the next day that some one told Mother Mary, at the poor boarding-house where she stayed, that a woman wanted a few words with her. The visitor was Teen. She was worn and wan and sobbing with excitement. Her baby was soon to be born. She did not look as if she had enough to eat. She had come, she said, just to see Mother Mary, just to tell her, for Jack never would tell himself, but she was sure her husband had reformed ; he would never drink again ; he meant to be a sober man ; and Mother Mary ought to know she did it, for she did, God bless her !

"I've walked all this way to bless you for myself," said Teen. "I ain't very fit for walkin', nor I can't afford a ferry-ticket, for he didn't leave me nothin' on this trip, but I've come to bless you. My husband come to your meetin', Mother Mary, by himself, Jack did. He never goes to no meetin's,—nobody could n't drove him ; but he come to yours because he says you treat a man like folks, and he would n't go inside, for he'd ben drinkin' and he felt ashamed. So he set outside upon a box behind the winder and he peeked in. And he said it rained on him while he set peekin', for he wanted to get a look at you. And he come home and told me, for we'd had some words beforehand, and I was glad to see him. I was settin' there and cryin' when he come. 'I would n't, Teen,' says he, 'for I've seen Mother

Mary, and I'm reformed,' says he. So he told me how he set upon the box and peeked. He says you looked straight at him. He says you stood up very tall and kind of white. He says you read something out of a book, and then you sang to him. He says the song you sang was Rock of Ages, and it made him feel so bad I had to cry to see him. He come in, and he got down on the lounge against our window, and he put his hand acrost his eyes and groaned like he was hurted in an accident. And he says, 'Teen, I wished I was a better man.' And I says, 'Jack, I wished you was.' And he says, 'I lost the hanker when I heard her sing the Rock of Ages, and if I lost the hanker I could swear off.' So I did n't answer him, for if I says, 'do swear off,' he'd just swear on, — they won't, you know, for wives. But I made him a cup of coffee, for I did n't know what else to do, and I brought it to him on the lounge, and he thanked me. 'Teen,' he says, 'I'll never drink a drop again, so help me Mother Mary!' And then he kissed me, — for they don't, you know, after you've been married. And he's gone out haddockin', but we parted very kind. And so I come to tell you, for it may n't be many days that I could walk it, and I've been that to him as I said I should, and I thought you'd better know."

"You've had no breakfast," answered Mother Mary, "and you've walked too far. Here, stop at the Holly Tree as you go home; get a bowl of soup; and take the ferry back. There, there! don't cry quite so hard. I'll try to stay a little longer. I won't leave town till Jack comes in. It *takes* the Rock of Ages to cure the hanker, Teen. But I've seen older men than he is stop as if they had been stopped by a lasso thrown from

heaven. If there's any save in him," added Mother Mary below her breath, "he shall have his chance, this time."

He went aboard sober, and sober he stayed. He kept a good deal by himself and thought of many things. His face paled out and refined, as their faces do, from abstinence; the ghost of his good looks hovered about him; he mended up his clothes; he did a kind turn to a messmate now and then; he told some excellent clean stories, and raised the spirits of the crew; he lent a dollar to a fellow with the rheumatism who had an indebtedness to liquidate for St. Galen's Oil. When he had done this, he remembered that he had left his wife without money, and said aloud: "That's a — mean trick to play on a woman."

He had bad luck, however, that trip; his share was small; he made seven dollars and twenty-seven cents in three weeks. This was conceded by the crew of the fishing-schooner (her name was the *Destiny*) to be because Jack had "sworn off." It is a superstition among them. One unfamiliar with the lives of these men will hammer cold iron if he thinks to persuade them that rum and luck do not go together; or that to "reform" does not imply a reduction of personal income. You might as well try to put the fisherman's fist into a Honiton lace jumper, as the fisherman's mind into proportion upon this point.

Therefore Jack took his poor trip carelessly; it was to be expected; he would explain it to Mother Mary when he got in. He drank nothing at all; and they weighed for home.

When Jack stepped off the *Destiny*, at Zephaniah Salt & Co.'s wharf at Fairharbor, after that voyage,

clean, pale, good-natured, and sober, thinking that he would get shaved before he hurried home to Teen, and wishing he could pay the grocer's bill upon the way, and thinking that, in default of this, he would start an account at the market, and carry her a chop or a sausage, in fact, thinking about her with an absorption which resembled consideration, if not affection, — suddenly he caught her name upon the wharves.

It may have been said of accident, or of the devil, — God knew; they may have been too drunk to notice Jack at first, or they may have seen and scented from afar the bad blood they stirred, like the hounds they were. It will never be told. The scandal of these places is incredibly barbarous, but it is less than the barbarity of drinking men to a man who strikes out from among themselves, and fights for his respectability.

The words were few, — they are not for us, — but they were enough to do the deed. Jack was quite sober. He understood. They assailed the honor of his home, the truth of his wife; they hurled her past at her and at himself; they derided the trust which he had in her in his absence; they sneered at the "reformed man" whose domestic prospects were — as they were; they exulted over him with the exultation in the sight of the havoc wrought, which is the most inexplicable impulse of evil.

Everybody knew how hot-blooded Jack was; and when the fury rushed red over his face painted gray by abstinence, there was a smart scattering upon the wharves.

His hand clapped to his pockets; but his was an old, cheap, rusty pistol (he had swapped a Bible and his trawls for it once, upon a spree, and got cheated); it

held but one cartridge, and his wrist shook. The shot went sputtering into the water, and no harm came of it. Jack jammed the pistol back into his pocket ; he glared about him madly, but had his glare for his pains ; the men were afraid of him ; he was alone upon the wharf.

It can hardly be said that he hesitated. Would that it could. Raving to himself, — head down, hands clenched, feet stumbling like a blind man's, — the fisherman sank into the first open door he staggered by, as a seiner, pierced by an invisible swordfish, sinks into the sea. He had fifteen such places to pass before he reached his house. His chances were — as such chances go — at best.

He drank for half an hour — an hour — a half more — came out, and went straight home.

It was now night of a February day. It had not been a very cold day ; a light, clean snow had fallen, which was thawing gently. Jack, looking dimly on through his craze, saw the light of his half of the gray cottage shining ahead ; he perceived that the frost was melted from the windows. The warm color came quietly down to greet him across the fresh snow ; it had to him in his delirium the look of a woman's eyes when they are true, and lean out of her love to greet a man. He did not put this to himself in these words, but only said :

"Them lamps look like she used to, — curse her !" and so went hurtling on.

He dashed up against the house, as a bowsprit dashes on the rocks, took one mad look through the unfrosted window, below the half-drawn curtain, and flung himself against the door, and in.

His wife sat there in the great rocking-chair, leaning

back ; she had a pillow behind her and her feet on the salt-fish box which he had covered once to make a cricket for her, when they were first married. She looked pale and pretty — very pretty. She was talking to a visitor who sat upon the lounge beside her. It was a man. Now, Jack knew this man well ; it was an old messmate ; he had sworn off, a year ago, and they had gone different ways ; he used to be a rough fellow ; but people said now you would n't know him.

"I ain't so drunk but I see who you be, Jim," began the husband darkly ; "I'll settle with *you* another day. I've got that to say to my wife I'd say better if we missed your company. Leave us by ourselves !"

"Look here, Jack," Jim flashed good-humoredly, "you're drunk, you know. She'll tell you what I come for. You ask her. Seein' she was n't right smart — and there's them as says she lacked for victuals, — my wife sent me over with a bowl of cranberry sass, so help me Heaven !"

"I'll kill *you* some other evenin'. Leave us be !" cried Jack.

"We was settin' and talkin' about the Reform Club when you come in," objected Jim, with the patience of an old friend. "We was wonderin' if we could n't get you to sign, Jack. Ask her if we was n't. Come, now ! I would n't make a fool of myself if I was you, Jack. See there. You've set her to cryin' already. And she ain't right smart."

"Clear out of my house !" * thundered Jack. "Leave us be by ourselves !"

"I don't know 's I'd ought to," hesitated Jim.

* Such peculiarities of Jack's pronunciation as were attributable to his condition will not be reproduced here.

"Leave us be! or I won't leave you be a d--- minute longer! Ain't it my house? Get out of it!"

"It is, that's a fact," admitted the visitor, looking perplexed; "but I declare to Jupiter I don't know's I'd oughter leave it, the way things look. Have your senses, Jack, my boy! *Have* your senses! She ain't right smart."

But with this Jack sprang upon him, and the wife cried out between them, for the love of mercy, that murder would be done.

"Leave us be!" she pleaded, sobbing. "Nothin' else won't pacify him. Go, Jim, go, and shut the door, and thank her, for the cranberry sarse was very kind of her, and for my husband's sake don't tell nobody he wasn't kind to me. There. That's right. There."

She sank back into the rocking-chair, for she was feeble still, and looked gently up into her husband's face. All the tones of her agitated voice had changed.

She spoke very low and calmly, as if she gathered her breath for the first stage of a struggle whose nature she solemnly understood. She had grown exceedingly pale.

"Jack, dear?" softly.

"I'll give ye time," he answered with an ominous quiet. "Tell yer story first. Out with it!"

"I have n't got nothin' to tell, Jack. He brought the cranberry sarse, for his wife took care of me, and she was very kind. And he set a little, and we was talkin' about the club, just as he says we was. It's Mother Mary's club, Jack. She's made Jim secretary, and she wanted you to join, for I told her you'd reformed. Oh, Jack, I told her you'd reformed! — Jack, Jack! Oh, Jack! What are you goin' to do to me! What makes you look like that? — Jack, Jack, *Jack!*"

"Stand up here!" he raved. He was past reason, and she saw it; he tore off his coat and pushed up his sleeves from his tattooed arms.

"You've played me false, I say! I trusted ye, and you've tricked me. I'll teach ye to be the talk upon the wharves another time when I get in from Georges'!"

She stood as he bade her, tottered and sank back; crawled up again, holding by the wooden arm of the rocking-chair, and stretched one hand out to him, feebly. She did not dare to touch him; if she had clung to him, he would have throttled her. When she saw him rolling up his sleeves, her heart stood still. But Teen thought: "I will not show him I'm afraid of him. It's the only chance I've got."

The poor girl looked up once into his face, and thought she smiled.

"Jack? *Dear* Jack!"

"I'll teach ye! I'll teach ye!"

"Oh, wait a moment, Jack. For the love of Heaven, — stop a minute! I've been that I said I'd be to you, since we was married. I've been an honest wife to you, my boy, and there's none on earth nor heaven as can look me in the eye and darst to say I have n't. I swore to ye upon the Rock of Ages, Mother Mary witnessin', — why, Jack!" her voice sank to infinite sweetness, "have ye forgotten? You ain't yourself, poor boy. You'll be so sorry. I ain't very strong, yet, — you'd feel bad if you should hit me — again. I'd hate to have you feel so bad. Jack dear, don't. Go look in the other room, before you strike again. Ye ain't seen it yet. Jack, for the love of mercy! — Jack! Jack!"

"Say you've played me false, and I'll stop. Own up, and I'll quit. Own up to me, I say!"

"I can't own up to you, for I swore you by the Rock of Ages; I swore ye I would be an honest wife. You may pummel me to death, but I'll not lie away them words I swore to ye . . . by that, . . . Jack, for the love of Heaven, don't ye, Jack! For the way you used to feel to me, dear, dear Jack! For the sake of the babies we had, . . . and you walked beside of me, to bury 'em! Oh, for God's sake . . . *Jack!* . . . Oh, you said you'd be *kind* to me . . . Oh, ye'll be so sorry! For the love of pity! For the love of God! Not the *pistol!* Oh, for the Rock of" —

But there he struck her down. The butt end of the weapon was heavy enough to do the deed. He struck, and then flung it away.

Upon his bared arm, as it came crashing, the crucifix was spattered red.

V.

HE stood up stupidly and looked about the room. The covers were off the kitchen stove, and the heart of the coals blazed out. Her yellow hair had loosened as she fell, and shone upon the floor.

He remembered that she spoke about the other room, and said of something yonder, that he had n't seen it yet. Confusedly he wondered what it was. He stumbled in and stared about the bedroom. It was not very light there, and it was some moments before he perceived the cradle, standing straight across his way. The child waked as he hit the cradle, and began to cry, stretching out its hands.

He had forgotten all about the baby. There had been so many.

"YOU'D BETTER GET UP, THEN; IT'S CRYIN' AFTER YOU." Page 46.



"You'd better get up, Teen," he said as he went out; "it's cryin' after you."

He shut the door and staggered down the steps. He hesitated once, and thought he would go back and say to her :

"What 's the use of layin' there? "

But he thought better, or worse, of it, and went his way. He went out and reshipped at once, lingering only long enough to drink madly on the way, at a place he knew, where he was sure to be let alone. The men were afraid of Jack, when he was so far gone under as this. Nobody spoke to him. He went down to Salt Brothers' wharf, opposite Salt & Co.'s, and found the *Daredevil*, just about to weigh. She was short by one hand, and took him as he was.

He was surprised to find himself aboard when the next sun went down ; he had turned in his bunk and was overheard to call for Teen, ordering her to do some service for him, testily enough.

"Oh," he muttered, "she ain't here, is she? Be blasted if I ain't on the *Daredevil*."

He was good for nothing, for a matter of days, and silent or sullen for the trip. It had been a heavy spree. He fell to, when he came to himself, and fished desperately ; his luck turned, and he made money ; he made seventy-five dollars. They were gone three weeks. They had a bitter voyage, for it was March.

They struck a gale at Georges', and another coming home. It snowed a great deal, and the rigging froze. The crew were uncommonly cold. They kept the steward cooking briskly, and four or five hot meals a day were not enough to keep one's courage up. They were particular about their cooking, as fishermen are, and

the steward of the *Daredevil* was famous in his calling. But it was conceded to be unusually cold, even for March, at Georges'. One must keep the blood racing, somehow, for life's sake.

Whiskey flowed fast between meals. Jack was observed not to limit himself. "It was for luck," he said. Take it through, it was a hard trip. The sober men — there were some — looked grim and pinched ; the drinkers ugly.

"It's a hound's life," said a dory-mate of Jack's one day. His name was Rowe — Rowe Salt ; he was a half-brother of Jim's. But Jim was at home. And Teen, of course, was at home. Jack had not spoken of her ; he had thought of her, — he had thought of nothing else. God knows what those thoughts had been. When Rowe spoke to him in this fashion, Jack looked hard at him.

"I've been thinkin' ef it disobligated a feller," he said.

"Hey ?" asked Rowe.

"If you was treated like folks ; but you ain't. You're froze. You're soaked. You're wrecked. Your nets is stole. You're drove off in the fog. You're drowned, and you lose your trawls. If you swear off, you miss your luck. It's dirty aboard. Folks don't like the looks of you. There's alwers a hanker in the pit o' your stomick. When you get upon a tear you don't know what you — do to — folks."

Jack stopped himself abruptly, and leaned upon his oar ; they were trawling, and the weather grew thick.

"Rowe," he said, staring off into the fog, "did ye ever think we was like fishes, us Fairharbor folks ?"

"I don't know's I hev," said the dory-mate, staring too.

"Well, we be, I think. We live in it and we're drowned in it, and we can't get out on 't, — we can't *get* out. We look like 'em, too. I've thought about that. Some of us look like haddock. You've got the halibut look yourself. Skipper, he's got the jib of a monk-fish, — you ken see it for yourself. There's a man I messed with, once, reminded me of a sculpin. I guess I'd pass for a lobster, myself, — for color, anyhow. We take it out someways, each on us. Don't ye know the look the women folks have when they get old and have gone hungry? You can tell by the build of a boy which way he'll turn out, — halibut way, or



hake, or mebbe mackerel if he's sleek and little. It's a kind of a birth-mark, I should n't wonder. There's no gettin' out on 't, no more 'n it out of you. Sometimes I used to think —

"Good Lord!" cried Jack. He laid down his oar again, and the dory wheeled to starboard sharply.

"Rowe Salt, you look there! You tell me if you see a woman yonder, on the water!"

"You've got the jim-jams, Jack. Women folks don't

walk at Georges'. I can't see nothin' nowhere, but it's thick as" —

"It's thick as hell," interrupted Jack, "and there's a woman walkin' on the water, — Lord! don't you see her? Lord! her hair is yellor hair, and it's streamin' over her, — don't *you* see her? She's walkin' on this devilish fog to-wards the dory, — Teen? Teen! There! Lord save me, Rowe, if I didn't see my wife come walkin' towards us, us settin' in this dory. — Hi-i-igh! I'll swear off when I get home. I'll tell her so. I hate to see such things."

"You see, Rowe," Jack added presently, — for he had not spoken after that, but had fallen grimly to work. It was ten below, and the wind was taking the backward spring for a bitter blow; both men, tugging at their trawls through the high and icy sea, were suffering too much to talk, — "ye see we had some words before I come aboard, and she warn't right smart. The baby can't be very old. I don' know how old it is. I was uncommon drunk; I don't remember what I did to her. I'm afraid I hit her, — for I had some words with her. I wished I was at home. She won't tell nobody. She never does. But I'm set to be at home and tell her I've sworn off. I've got money for her this trip, too; I'm afraid she's in a hurry for it."

After this outburst of confidence, Jack seemed to cling to his dory-mate; he followed him about deck, and looked wistfully at him. Jack had begun to take on the haggard look of the abstainer once again. The crew thought he did not seem like himself. He had stopped drinking, abruptly, after that day in the fog, and suffered heavily from the weather and from exposure.

"I say, Rowe," he asked one day, "if anything was

to happen, would you jest step in and tell my wife I did n't believe that yarn about her? She'll know."

Now it befell, that when they were rounding Eastern Point, and not till then, they bespoke the *Destiny*, which was outward bound, and signaled them. She drew to speaking distance, and her skipper had a word with the master of the *Daredevil*, but he spoke none too loud, and made his errand quickly, and veered to his own course, and the two boats parted company, and the *Daredevil* came bustling in. They were almost home.

It was remembered afterward that Jack was badly frostbitten upon that voyage; he looked badly; he had strange ways; the men did not know exactly how to take him. He was overheard to say:

"I ain't agoin' to go to Georges' again."

Rowe Salt overheard this, after the skipper of the *Destiny* had signaled and tacked. Jack was sitting aft alone, when he said it, looking seaward. He had paid little or no attention to the incident of the *Destiny*, but sat staring, plunged in some mood of his own which seemed as solitary, as removed from his kind and from their comprehension, as the moods of mental disorder are from the sane.

So then, with such dexterity as the ignorant man could muster, Salt got his friend down below, on some pretext, and stood looking at him helplessly.

"You don't look well, Rowe," Jack suggested pleasantly.

"Jack," said his dory-mate, turning white enough, "I'll make no bones of it, nor mince nothin', for somebody's got to tell ye, and they said it must be me. There's a warrant after ye. The sheriff's on the tug betwixt us and the wharf. She's layin' off of the island, him aboard of her."

"I never was in prison," faltered Jack. "The boys have always bailed me."

"T ain't a bailin' matter, Jack, this time."

"What did you say?"

"I said it was n't a bailin' business. Somebody's got to tell you."

Jack gazed confidently up into his friend's face.

"What was it that I done, old boy? Can't ye tell me?"

"Let the sheriff tell you. Ask the sheriff. I'd rather it was the sheriff told you, Jack."

"Tell me what it is I done, Rowe Salt; I'd tell *you*."

He looked puzzled.

"The sheriff knows more about it nor I do," begged the fisherman; "don't make an old messmate tell you."

"All right," said Jack, turning away. He had now grown very quiet. He pleaded no more, only to mutter once:

"I'd rather heard it from a messmate."

Rowe Salt took a step or two, turned, stopped, stirred, and turned again.

"You killed somebody, then, if you will know."

"*Killed* somebody?"

"Yes."

"I was drunk and killed somebody?"

"Lord help you, yes."

"I hope," hoarsely — "Look here, Salt. *I hope Teen won't know.*

"I say, Rowe," after a long pause, "who was it that I killed?"

"Ask the sheriff."

"Who was it that I killed?"

"The skipper'll tell you, mebby. I won't. No, I

vow I won't. Let me go. I've done my share of this. Let me up on deck! I want the air!"

"I won't let you up on deck — so help me! — till you tell!"

"Let me off, Jack, let me off!"



"Tell me who it was, I say!"

"Lord in heaven, the poor devil don't *know*, — he really don't."

"I thought you would ha' told me, Rowe," said Jack with a smile, — his old winning smile, that had captivated his messmates all his life.

"I *will* tell you!" cried Rowe Salt with an oath of agony. "You killed your wife! You murdered her. She's dead. Teen ain't to home. She's dead."

VI.

THEY made way for him at this side and at that, for he sprang up the gangway, and dashed among them. When he saw them all together, and how they looked at him, he stopped. A change seemed to strike his purpose, be it what it might.

"Boys," said Jack, looking all about, "ye won't have to go no bail for me. I'll bide my account, this time."

He parted from them, for they let him do the thing he would, and got himself alone into the bows, and there he sank down, crouching, and no one spoke to him.

The *Daredevil* rounded Eastern Point, and down the shining harbor, all sails set, came gayly in. They were almost home.

Straightway there started out upon the winter sea a strong, sweet tenor, like a cry. It was Jack's voice, — everybody knew it. He stood by himself in the bows, back to them, singing like an angel or a madman, — some said this; some said the other, —

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me!
Let me hide myself in thee; . . .
Thou must save, and thou alone . . .
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See thee on thy judgment throne," —

sang Jack.

With the ceasing of his voice, they divined how it was, by one instinct, and every man sprang to him. But he had leaped and gained on them.



The waters of Fairharbor seemed themselves to leap to greet him as he went down. These that had borne him and ruined him buried him as if they loved him.

He had pushed up his sleeves for the spring, hard to the shoulder, like a man who would wrestle at odds.

As he sank, one bared arm, thrust above the crest of the long wave, lifted itself toward the sky. It was his right arm, on which the crucifix was stamped.

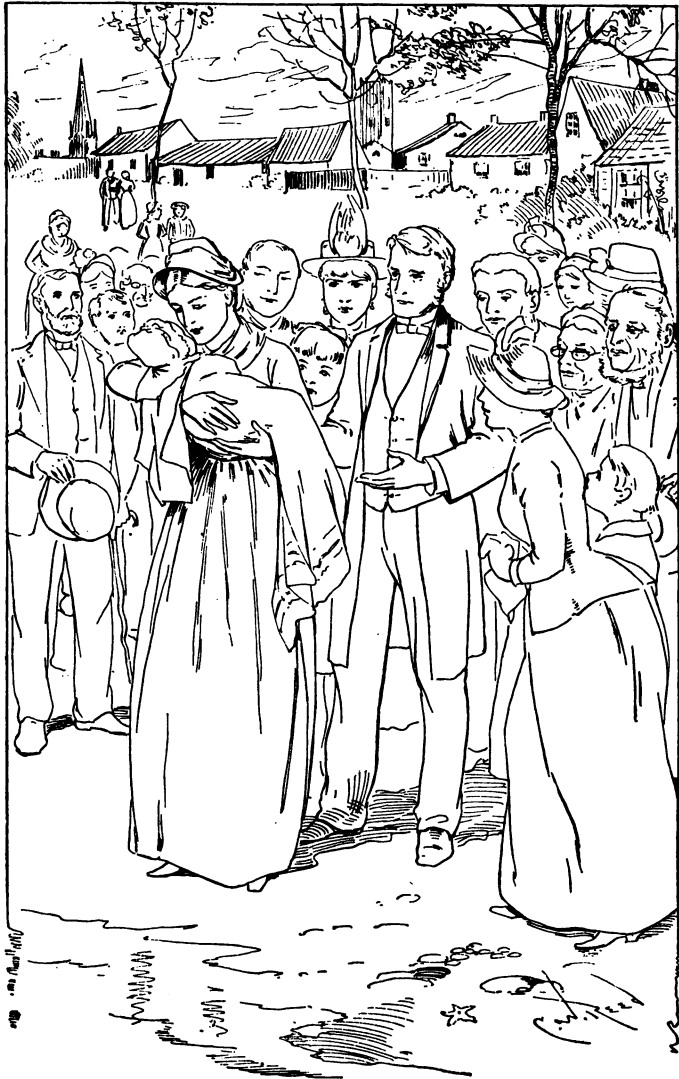
VII.

WHITE and gold as the lips and heart of a lily, the day blossomed at Fairharbor one June Sunday, when these things were as a tale that is told. It was a warm day, sweet and still. There was no wind, no fog. The harbor wore her innocent face. She has one; who can help believing in it, to see it? The waves stretched themselves upon the beach as if they had been hands laid out in benediction; and the colors of the sky were like the expression of a strong and solemn countenance.

So thought Mother Mary, standing by her husband's side that day, and looking off from the little creature in her arms to the faces of the fishermen gathered there about her for the service. It was an open-air service, held upon the beach, where the people she had served and loved could freely come to her — and would. They had sought the scene in large numbers. The summer people, too, strolled down, distant and different, and hung upon the edges of the group. They had a civil welcome, but no more. This was a fisherman's affair; nobody needed them; Mother Mary did not belong to them.

"The meetin's ours," said Rowe Salt. "It's us she's after. The boarders ain't of no account to her."

His brother Jim was there with Rowe, and Jim's wife, and some of the respectable women neighbors. The skipper of the *Daredevil* was there, and so were many



"BUT NO ONE HEARD THE OTHER WORDS, SAID BY MOTHER MARY."
Page 58.

of Jack's old messmates. When it was understood that Mother Mary had adopted Jack's baby, the news had run like rising tide, from wharf to wharf, from deck to deck, — everybody knew it, by this time. Almost everybody was there, to see the baptism. The Fairharbor fishermen were alert to the honor of their guild. They turned out in force to explain matters, sensitive to show their best. They would have it understood that one may have one's faults, but one does not, therefore, murder one's wife.

The scene in the annals and the legends of Fairharbor was memorable, and will be long. It was as strange to the seamen as a leaf thrown over from the pages of the Book of Life, inscribed in an unknown tongue of which they only knew that it was the tongue of love. Whether it spoke as of men or of angels, they would have been perplexed to say.

Into her childless life, its poverty, its struggles, its sacrifices, and its blessed hope, Mother Mary's great heart took the baby as she took a man's own better nature for him ; that which lay so puny and so orphaned in those wild lives of theirs, an infant in her hands.

Jack's baby, *Jack's* baby and Teen's, as if it had been anybody's else baby, was to be baptized "like folks." Jack's baby, poor little devil, was to have his chance.

The men talked it over gravely ; it affected them with a respect one would not anticipate, who did not know them. They had their Sunday clothes on. They were all clean. They had a quiet look. One fellow who had taken a little too much ventured down upon the beach ; but he was hustled away from the christening, and ducked in the cove, and hung upon the rocks to dry. One must be sober who helped to baptize that baby.

This was quite understood.

They sang the hymn, Jack's hymn and Teen's: of course they sang the Rock of Ages; and Mother Mary's husband read "the chapter" to them, as he was used, and spoke to them; and it was so still among them that they could hear each wave of the placid sea beat evenly as if they listened to the beating of a near and mighty peaceful heart. Mother Mary spoke with them herself a little. She told them how she took the child, in despair of the past, in hope of the future; in pain and in pity, and in love; yearning over him, and his, and those who were of their inheritance, and fate, their chances, and their sorrows, and their sins. She told them of the child's pure heart within us all, which needs only to be mothered to be saved; which needs only that we foster it, to form it; which needs that we treat it as we do other weak and helpless things, whether in ourselves or in another. What was noble in them all, she said, was to them like this little thing, to her. It was a trust. She gave it to them, so she said, as she took the baby, here before their witnessing, to spare him from their miseries, if she might.

They were touched by this, or they seemed to be; for they listened from their souls.

"We'd oughter take off our hats," somebody whispered. So they stood uncovered before the minister, and Mother Mary, and Jack's poor baby. The sacred drops flashed in the white air. Dreamily the fishermen heard the sacred words:

"In the name of the Father: And of the Son: And of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

But no one heard the other words, said by Mother Mary close and low, when she received the child into her arms again, and bowed her face above it:—

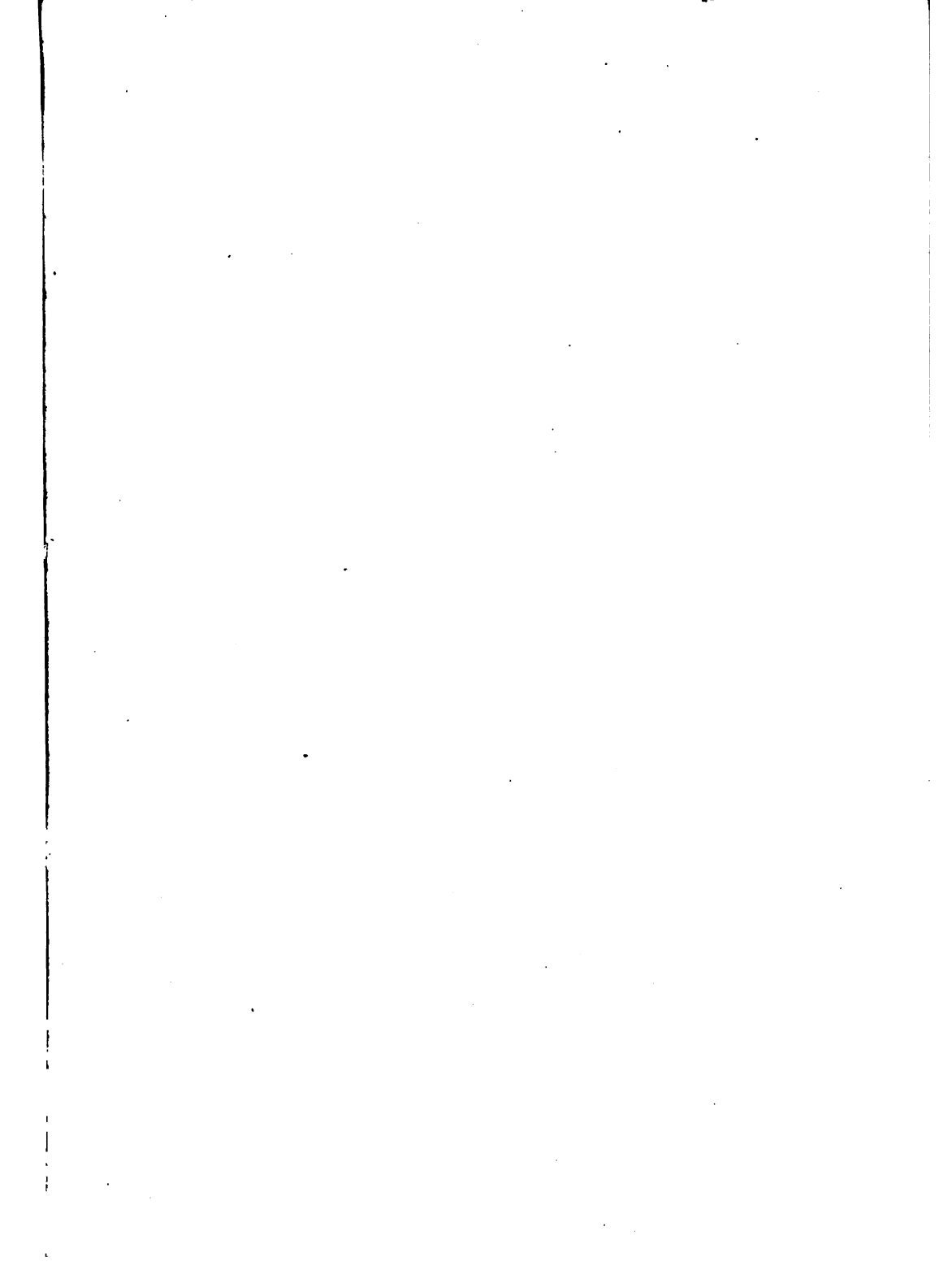
"My son, I take thee for the sake and for the love of thy father, and of thy mother. Be thou their holy ghost."

But the fishermen, used not to understand her, but only to her understanding them, perceiving that she was at prayer, they knew not why, asking of Heaven they knew not what, — the fishermen said :

Amen, Amen.



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